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ABSTRACT

This article describes the new associate of arts degree in entrepreneurship at Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas. Offered in Haskell's Center for Tribal Entrepreneurial Studies, the program comprises four culturally appropriate courses. The first course, Introduction to Entrepreneurship, assists students in analyzing whether or not entrepreneurism is really for them. Once past the "barrier phase," the students translate business ideas into action through hands-on learning processes that lead to a feasibility study, a business plan, and an on-campus practicum internship or course of study in reservation-based business. Further goals of the program include installment of a case study training program in entrepreneurship to enable others to teach it, extension of entrepreneurial teaching to tribal councils nationwide, and introduction of an entrepreneurial component into the Haskell elementary teacher education program. The Haskell chapter of American Indian Business Leaders earned "Most Distinguished Chapter" award for the 1996-97 school year. (SAS)

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ED 424 043

Haskell builds a home for entrepreneurs in Indian Country

LAWRENCE, Kan. — As a new fall semester gets underway at Haskell Indian Nations University, a new course offering emphasizes entrepreneurism as a habit of mind and a harbinger of action.

The associate of arts degree in Haskell's Center for Tribal Entrepreneurial Studies comprises four culturally appropriate courses, but the first is most important. Introduction to Entrepreneurship assists students in analyzing whether or not entrepreneurism, involving a will toward self-sufficiency and a weather eye out for business opportunity — as well as the risk-tolerance to pursue a dream — is really for them, a key step according to Center director Cheryl Foley Chuckluck. For despite a tendency in tribal culture to associate the entrepreneur with individualism, Chuckluck believes that when Native Americans see an activity as valuable and good — "We take those barriers off," internal barriers often built up by exclusion from mainstream financial channels and unfamiliarity with models of self-sufficient enterprise.

Haskell students who decide that entrepreneurism is valuable and good have committed to a habit of mind that vaults them beyond what Chuckluck calls "the barrier phase." The rest of the CTES program will help them translate business ideas into action, through hands-on learning processes that lead first to a feasibility study, a business plan, and finally an on-campus practicum, internship, or course of study in reservation-based business.

The practicum calls for students to begin a business on campus through "bootstrapping" resources. One student started a mobile coffee cart, for example, with an espresso machine and a shop on wheels, a move that found a market niche on a campus whose coffee shop is a fair walk from the classroom and faculty buildings.

Cheryl Foley Chuckluck

Another great idea, for making and marketing Haskell class rings and other jewelry, still has potential but is currently teaching students the importance of research into the set-up of supply and distribution channels, Chuckluck said.

Her distant dream is for a business incubator to begin on campus, but in the meantime she is working to fulfill the Center's stated goals. With the coursework now in place (except for further development in the internship program), her attention has turned to the second of those

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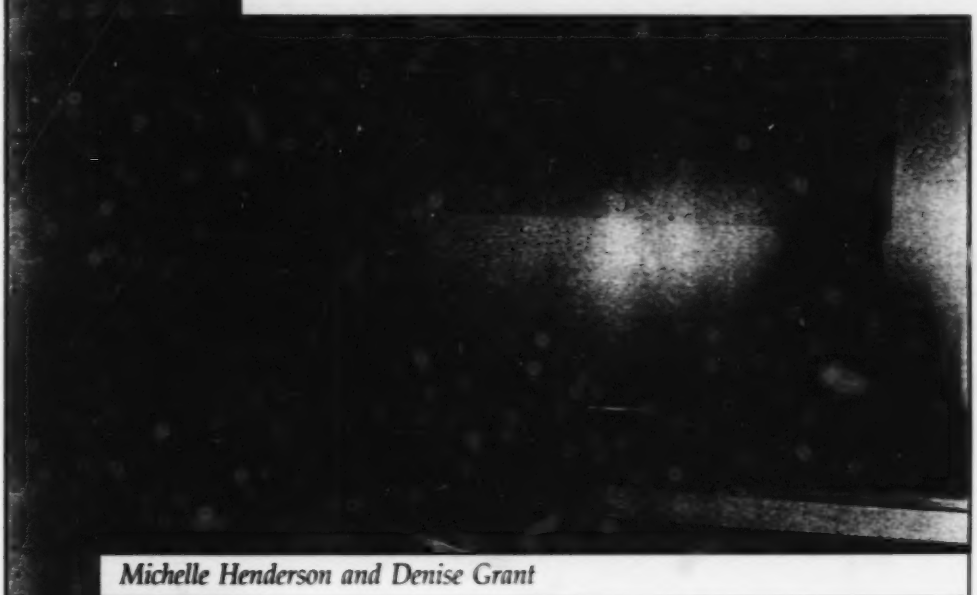
goals: the installment of a training program in entrepreneurship and of curricula that will enable others to teach it. Because the research indicates that entrepreneurs learn best through case study analysis and role models, initial efforts here have focused on developing case studies of Indian entrepreneurs. Haskell's case study initiative, Community Innovation and Renewal through Creative Learning and Entrepreneurship, or CIRCLE, is modeled on a program of Babson College, a sister institution near Boston. A 1996 brainstorming session led Haskell to adopt the Babson model; a CIRCLE Back session Oct. 6 through 8 is expected to generate the appropriate case studies and a video.



Michelle Henderson and Denise Grant

In addition to CTES students, Haskell plans to approach tribal councils with its entrepreneurial teachings, in hopes of changing mindsets enough to enhance the chances of implementing businesses on reservations. The full CIRCLE agenda will be two to three years in development and then the university plans to take it national, perhaps through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium's distance learning system.

The Center's third goal may be the most difficult, Chuckluck said: introducing an entrepreneurial component into the Haskell elementary (grades 1 through 8) teacher education program. That particular curriculum is already so loaded that any new coursework will have to be shoehorned in, Chuckluck explained.

But as more and more Native Americans emerge from what Chuckluck calls the "barrier phase," the groundwork is being laid for a learning process and a critical mass is forming of accomplished professionals who can further the individual decision for self-sufficiency.

The time is right, Chuckluck said, "because eventually those federal dollars aren't going to be there." The advent of welfare reform, with its strict eligibility rules and incentives for tribal control, also tends to encourage the kind of self-sufficiency embodied in entrepreneurism.

"It works," Chuckluck said. "Just give us the opportunity and we will surprise."

In the case of CTES, opportunity came from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, whose Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership Inc. awarded a three-year, $500,000 grant to establish the Center on the Lawrence campus. The Center has since won the Price-Babson College Fellows Program's Edwin M. Appell Award, given to individuals and groups that have helped their community

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by bringing entrepreneurism to it — an outgrowth of the Center's assistance in implementing the American Indian Minority Business Association in Kansas City, a kind of Indian chamber of commerce that leveraged a $16 million set-aside for Indian-owned businesses from the city of Kansas City.

Moreover, the Haskell chapter of American Indian Business Leaders earned AIBL's "Most Distinguished Chapter" award for the 1996-97 school year. The Center developed the Haskell chapter as a way to emphasize the entrepreneurial component of AIBL; it has since become one of the more admired student groups on campus, Chuckluck said. "They take care of business, they build a team, they get things done."

AIBL currently has chapters at 27 colleges and universities, with others in formation, according to executive director Michelle Henderson. Its Entrepreneur Internship Program, also funded by the Kaufman Foundation's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, places student interns with employers through a continuously updated database; interested parties can call Henderson or Denise Grant at 406/243-4879.

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